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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Summary record of the 6th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 21 June 2010, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. St. Aimee ..... (Saint Lucia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Special Committee decision of 9 June 2008 concerning Puerto Rico (*continued*)
(A/AC.109/2010/L.4 and A/AC.109/2010/L.8)

Hearing of petitioners (*continued*)

1. **The Chairman** said that, in line with the Special Committee's usual practice, petitioners would be invited to address the Committee and would withdraw after making their statements.

2. **Ms. González Arias** (Coalición Puertorriqueña contra la Pena de Muerte) said that her organization, founded to oppose the death penalty, wished the Special Committee, in its draft resolution on Puerto Rico, to call for the prohibition of the application of capital punishment to Puerto Ricans. While Puerto Rico had legislated the abolition of capital punishment, a decision with constitutional status, it was subject to United States legislation, which permitted it.

3. The government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico was powerless to prevent the extradition of residents of the island to the mainland United States of America, where such penalties could be applied. Although, unless resident on the United States mainland, Puerto Ricans could not vote in United States elections, they were subject to the authority of the federal Government. Puerto Rico's lack of self-determination, owing to its legal relationship with the United States, was an aberration.

4. Direct and immediate action by the Special Committee was needed. The absence of self-determination, and the consequent application of the death penalty to Puerto Ricans against the will of the people, should be raised in the General Assembly.

5. **Ms. Aponte Rivera** (Comité de Familiares y Amigos de Avelino González Claudio) said that Mr. González Claudio, arrested by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation for alleged membership in a pro-independence political organization and the planning of its operations, had been inhumanely treated by federal prison authorities, with the result that he had become seriously ill. The treatment was typical of that meted out to campaigners for independence since the establishment of the United States colonial regime in violation of the will of the people.

6. Her organization called on the United States to respect Puerto Rico's right to freedom in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), to put an immediate end to the United States military, legal and political presence in the island, to release all political prisoners, and to transfer authority to the people of Puerto Rico so that it might achieve its independence.

7. **Mr. Ramos Rosado** (Prolibertad Freedom Campaign) said that the imprisonment of Puerto Ricans for their political activities in the cause of independence was a violation of human rights. Puerto Ricans were second-class citizens at the mercy of the United States Government. United States citizenship was imposed upon them, but they were denied basic rights, including political representation.

8. He appealed for the release of the three remaining Puerto Rican political prisoners, whose status had been denied by the United States and who had been subjected to harsh treatment as punishment for their beliefs, a violation of international norms. The United States considered itself a bastion of democracy and a champion of human rights, yet it repressed Puerto Ricans and others, and exploited its exemption from the transmission of information under Article 73 *e* of the Charter to commit human rights violations in the island without being held to account.

9. The United Nations should take immediate action to end the colonial occupation of Puerto Rico.

10. **Mr. Ortiz** (Movimiento de Afirmación Viequense) said that the human rights of the residents of the island of Vieques were constantly violated by the United States Government, which over some 60 years had used the island for military manoeuvres and as a target range. The legacy was the presence of thousands of unexploded bombs, which were routinely destroyed by the setting of bush fires, resulting in widespread contamination of agricultural land and settlements. That had led to severe health problems and a high mortality rate among the population, environmental degradation and economic stagnation.

11. The refusal of the United States Government to accept responsibility for the harm caused, to clear and vacate land, and to pay compensation reflected the colonial status of Puerto Rico, and represented a systematic violation of human rights.

12. **Mr. Vega Ramos** (Partido Popular Democrático) said that the proposed Puerto Rico Democracy Act, by

presenting as an option the territorial subordination of the island, represented an attempt to engineer its annexation by the United States. However, the bill had been widely rejected in Puerto Rico.

13. Accordingly, the Special Committee, in its draft resolution, must reaffirm its earlier resolutions on Puerto Rico, in particular on its Commonwealth status, as well as the relevance of a constitutional assembly on status, call for an end to the application of the death penalty, and demand that the General Assembly reopen consideration of Puerto Rico's right to self-determination.

14. **Mr. Velgara** (Frente Socialista de Puerto Rico) called upon the Special Committee to condemn the colonial regime in Puerto Rico and urged the United States to recognize its right to independence.

15. The manner in which the United States Navy cleared unexploded ordnance on Vieques and the application of the death penalty — prohibited under the island's Constitution since 1952 — were testimony to the colonialist suppression of the people.

16. Rather than adopt further imperialist legislation, the United States Government should dismantle its military, legal and political machinery in the island, free all political prisoners, and transfer authority to the people of Puerto Rico.

17. **Mr. Koppel** (Socialist Workers Party) said that the struggles of students at the University of Puerto Rico, who had recently organized a successful strike against higher fees and reduced tuition waivers, and the experiences of Puerto Rican workers faced with public sector redundancies and wage freezes, highlighted the reality that Puerto Rico was a United States colony, as well as setting an example for working people and youth worldwide on how to resist capitalist rulers indifferent to everything except the profit motive. The people of Puerto Rico and workers and farmers in the United States of America had a common enemy, namely the Government of the United States and that country's billionaire families. A successful fight for the colony's independence was in the interests not only of the Puerto Rican people but also of the vast majority of the people of the United States of America.

18. He demanded the immediate release of the Puerto Rican political prisoners Oscar López and Avelino González and welcomed the fact that Carlos Alberto Torres was soon to be freed. The Cuban Five, who remained in the front line of the United States class struggle, must also be released from prison. Cuba's successful defence of its freedom over the past 50 years in the face of assaults by the United States Government disproved the imperialist claim that Puerto Rico could not survive without help from the United States.

19. **Mr. Rodríguez Banchs** (Movimiento al Socialismo) said that the Government of the United States maintained control over all key areas of the life of Puerto Rico, including defence, international relations, trade and immigration; the United States Administration had openly acknowledged that the island remained a United States colony. The Puerto Rican people were also subject to federal laws that violated human rights. Although the United States had signed and ratified a number of international conventions designed to protect workers' rights, many Puerto Rican workers were denied their right to freedom of association, to join trade unions, and to strike. Large corporations enjoyed a culture of impunity and the colonial Government had recently made thousands of public employees redundant by terminating many collective agreements.

20. Furthermore, United States prosecutors still applied the death penalty in Puerto Rico, even though it was expressly prohibited under Puerto Rican law, and the United States law enforcement and surveillance agencies continued to operate in Puerto Rico without being required to inform the Puerto Rican government of their operations. All Puerto Rican political prisoners held in United States prisons should be immediately and unconditionally released.

21. His organization called for Puerto Rico to be placed back on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories and for the United States Government to report to the international community on Puerto Rico's progress towards self-determination and independence. The colonial status of the island should be taken up by the General Assembly on a priority basis, the powers currently exercised in Puerto Rico by the United States Government should be transferred to the Puerto Rican people, and the entire military, judicial and political apparatus of the United States should be immediately withdrawn. His organization was grateful to Cuba for its ongoing solidarity with the Puerto Rican people and appreciated the support shown by Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

22. **Mr. Concepción** (Movimiento Patriótico Canario) said it was incomprehensible that there still existed colonies and Territories, such as Puerto Rico, which had not achieved freedom and developed as sovereign nations. Colonialism was illegitimate, a crime against humanity that must be eradicated. Puerto Rico had suffered throughout its colonial history. The Canary Isles had been compelled by the Spanish Empire to send its inhabitants to Puerto Rico under a programme of enforced emigration. His organization, from the oldest colony in the world, expressed its solidarity with the people of Puerto Rico and all those seeking peace and security.

23. **Ms. Colón Solá** (Juventud Hostosiana) noted that 50 years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) there had been no improvement in the situation in Puerto Rico. The inability of the people to take their own decisions undermined their fundamental civil and political rights and their economic development. The United States had claimed that the people of Puerto Rico had exercised their right to self-determination through the establishment of the Commonwealth, but an intrinsic element of the Puerto Rican Constitution, the Bill of Rights, had not been approved by the United States Congress, impairing the rights of the people.

24. Individual and collective freedoms and rights were the sine qua non of democracy. The recent strike by students at the University of Puerto Rico offered a model for Puerto Rican aspirations for independence, which alone would allow the Puerto Rican people to pursue their development. The way ahead lay with a constitutional assembly on status, while the effectiveness of the proposed plebiscite would depend on freedom of expression, access to information and freedom to dissent.

25. Her organization called on the General Assembly to renew its consideration of the colonial status of Puerto Rico, since only thus would the aspirations for self-determination and independence embodied in resolution 1514 (XV) be honoured in the case of Puerto Rico. Lastly, she called for the immediate release of Puerto Rican political prisoners.

26. **Mr. Limeres** (Comité Puertorriqueño Pro Independencia de Puerto Rico) said that the people of Puerto Rico were hamstrung by their colonial status, which prevented them from making their own determinations. Puerto Ricans had an inalienable right to take decisions in such areas as education, immigration, health and economic affairs. The economic situation, violence and corruption in the island undermined the credibility of its institutions, which served the interests of the imperial Power and sought to destroy what was Puerto Rican. Yet the protests against the United States Navy in Vieques and the recent student strike offered worthy examples.

27. Puerto Ricans had been deceived by political events, in that the 1953 Commonwealth agreement had been cited before the United Nations as an indication of autonomy, so that Puerto Rico had not been considered a colony. Today, that agreement was completely discredited. The time had come for the United Nations to end that state of affairs and for dignity and justice to prevail.

28. **Mr. Collado Schwarz** (Instituto Soberanista de Puerto Rico) said that, following the establishment of the Commonwealth, the United Nations had decided that the United States need not transmit information on Puerto Rico, with the result that its status had been determined without reference to the criteria for decolonization. Yet internal documentation of the United States Government showed that the real aim had been simply to remove Puerto Rico from United Nations oversight, and that there had been no real change in its status. The outcome was that while the United States might view Puerto Rico as a self-governing democracy, elsewhere it was viewed as an instance of neocolonialism. More recently, the House of Representatives of the United States of America had recognized that Puerto Rico did not enjoy full democracy in that Puerto Ricans could not participate in elections or in the approval of legislation governing them.

29. As a colony, with no prospect of independence, Puerto Rico and its economy were in dire straits, with high unemployment, heavy public indebtedness, rampant crime and drug trafficking and widespread domestic violence. His organization did not see how Puerto Ricans could resolve those problems when they were not represented in Congress, which had full authority over the island. Accordingly, he requested the Special Committee to refer the decolonization of Puerto Rico to the General Assembly and urged that a constitutional assembly on status should be held to decolonize one of the last remaining colonies.

30. **Mr. Figueroa García** (Puertorriqueños Por Puerto Rico) said that his organization had participated in the Puerto Rican general elections as a new political party in 2008; it was now the third political force in Puerto Rico. Its members included advocates of all the different options for Puerto Rico's political status. On 9 June 2008, it had appeared before the Special Committee to propose an alternative process of self-determination for Puerto Rico; however, the resolution adopted the same day by consensus had not taken account of any of its recommendations.

31. Two years later, the self-determination process had still not been initiated. Although that was partly attributable to a lack of determination on the part of the United Nations, as well as to the failure of the United States to respond to the legitimate aspirations of the Puerto Rican people, the political parties in Puerto Rico were also responsible, since they sought to justify their existence by defending their own particular formula for determining the island's status, rather than by promoting a genuine self-determination process. While new opportunities for Puerto Rican self-determination had opened up in the past two years, particularly in light of the pledge by the Democratic Party, now in power in the United States, to "work with all groups in Puerto Rico to enable the question of Puerto Rico's status to be resolved during the next four years", the political parties in Puerto Rico remained as inflexible as ever.

32. The Committee should therefore facilitate a self-determination process that would allow the Puerto Rican people to decide their political status, free of interference from political parties. All the alternatives should be given equal consideration; the peoples of Puerto Rico and the United States should be properly informed about them; and all parties involved should agree in advance to respect whichever option was democratically chosen. Until that occurred, the Puerto Rican people would remain in economic, social and political crisis. His organization recommended that the General Assembly should take up the issue of Puerto Rico's self-determination as a priority; that the United Nations should call on the United States Administration to meet its undertaking to resolve the question of Puerto Rico's status during the next four years; and that the Organization should accept the self-determination process proposed by Puertorriqueños Por Puerto Rico.

Draft resolution A/AC.109/2010/L.8 (continued)

33. **The Chairman** announced that the Plurinational State of Bolivia had become a sponsor of draft resolution A/AC.109/2010/L.8, introduced by the representative of Cuba at the 5th meeting.

34. **Mr. Edrees** (Observer for Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the Movement reaffirmed its position on the question of Puerto Rico, as contained in the Final Document of the Fifteenth Summit Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Recalling that, over the past 10 years, the Special Committee had adopted its resolutions on the issue of Puerto Rico by consensus, he called on the Government of the United States of America to expedite a process that would allow the Puerto Rican people to exercise fully their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, and to return the occupied land and installations on Vieques Island and at the Roosevelt Roads Naval Station to the Puerto Rican people. Lastly, he welcomed the Special Committee's willingness to adopt the draft resolution on Puerto Rico by consensus, as had also been the case in previous years.

35. **Mr. Valero Briceño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his delegation, as a sponsor of draft resolution A/AC.109/2010/L.8, unconditionally supported the fundamental and inalienable right of the Puerto Rican people to sovereignty and self-determination. Although Puerto Rico had been removed, in 1953, from the list of colonial territories in respect of which transmission of information was required under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations, the Puerto Rican people were still being denied their sovereignty. Consequently, his delegation reiterated its call for the United States Government to provide for a process that would allow the people of Puerto Rico to exercise fully their inalienable right to independence in conformity with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and the relevant resolutions and decisions of the Special Committee.

36. The international community continued to make clear its commitment to the decolonization of Puerto Rico. In particular, the Final Declaration of the Tenth Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) had reiterated its members' ongoing support for Puerto Rico's struggle to achieve

national sovereignty and end the imperialist occupation and military threat. His delegation hoped that draft resolution A/AC.109/2010/L.8 would be adopted without a vote, as had been the case in previous years.

37. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua), reiterating that Puerto Rico was an integral part of the Latin American and Caribbean region, said that its people had demonstrated extraordinary persistence in their struggle to exercise their right to self-determination and independence. Although 2010 marked the conclusion of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), the General Assembly had still not considered and discussed fully the question of Puerto Rico. His delegation therefore called on the General Assembly to engage in broad consideration of the colonial situation of Puerto Rico as soon as possible, and urged the Government of the United States to assume its responsibility in the decolonization process and begin implementing the numerous resolutions adopted by the Special Committee. Puerto Rico's self-determination and independence were vital to end centuries of occupation, the plundering of its natural resources and the destruction of its natural environment.

38. The Puerto Rican people were clearly dissatisfied with their colonial status and all the island's political parties, as well as civil society, were calling for change. The possible establishment of a constitutional assembly had been welcomed by civil society organizations. The demands of the Puerto Rican people were also receiving growing support from the international community, including the Non-Aligned Movement, ALBA, and many political parties in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Nicaragua was convinced that one day Puerto Rico would assume its rightful place as a full member of the United Nations.

39. **Mr. Carrión-Mena** (Ecuador) said that Ecuador's Constitution enshrined the right to self-determination. It was regrettable that, although the Special Committee had been considering the issue of Puerto Rico for over 30 years, it had been unable to make concrete progress to end the colonial relationship. The many resolutions and decisions that it had adopted over the years should now be implemented. His delegation urged the General Assembly to actively consider the question of Puerto Rico in all its aspects and called for the States Members of the United Nations to renew the commitments they had made at the start of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. Ecuador's decision to co-sponsor draft resolution A/AC.109/2010/L.8 reflected its commitment to the Puerto Rican people and its hope that Puerto Rico would soon join the community of independent and sovereign States, as a Latin American and Caribbean nation with its own unequivocal national identity.

40. **Mr. Loayza Barea** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that, 50 years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), multilateralism was unquestionably the way to resolve challenges of various kinds. Colonialist policies belonged to an interventionist past and constituted an unacceptable anachronism in the twenty-first century. Puerto Rico's status as a Commonwealth had not changed its colonial relationship with the United States, while its so-called Constitution allowed the United States Congress to retain power over vital areas of the island's life and economy.

41. The majority of the Puerto Rican people were in favour of decolonization. The proposed constitutional assembly on status was particularly important as a mechanism to ensure broad and representative participation by the people of Puerto Rico in a genuine and transparent self-determination process, with the ultimate goal of independence. In view of the solidarity with Puerto Rico expressed by various regional bodies, multilateral forums, and civil society organizations, the question of its colonial status should undoubtedly be placed back on the agenda of the General Assembly for active consideration in all its aspects. A third international decade for the eradication of colonialism should also be declared without delay.

42. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the people of Puerto Rico had been seeking self-determination for years. Thus far the Special Committee had adopted 28 draft resolutions and draft decisions reaffirming their right to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). The United States Government should assume its responsibilities in that regard.

43. His delegation fully supported the call by the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement at their fifteenth Summit for

implementation of the resolutions of the General Assembly demanding self-determination for the people of Puerto Rico. He trusted that the draft resolution before the Special Committee would be adopted by consensus, in a reaffirmation of international legitimacy and the principles of the United Nations, of which self-determination was the most important.

44. **Mr. Hosseini** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that exercise of the right to self-determination of people under foreign dominance was the most important component of the decolonization process for the Territories within the purview of the Special Committee, including Puerto Rico, whose people had a sovereign right to self-determination. He hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus, thereby sending a clear message that the Special Committee fully supported their right to independence. He reiterated his Government's unwavering support for the complete elimination of colonialism.

45. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2010/L.8 was adopted.*

46. **Mr. Benítez Versón** (Cuba), speaking in explanation of position, welcomed the adoption of the draft resolution, bringing to 29 the number of draft resolutions and draft decisions on Puerto Rico adopted by the Special Committee. Its adoption coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1514 (XV). The Cuban and Puerto Rican peoples were united by over a century of revolutionary struggle for independence, both having been colonized by Spain and then invaded by the United States in 1898. Despite suffering colonial domination for over a century, the people of Puerto Rico had preserved their culture and national identity. The people of Puerto Rico could rely on the solidarity of Cuba, which would always defend their legitimate right to self-determination and independence. He looked forward to the day when a free and sovereign Puerto Rico would join Cuba in the elimination of colonialism from the face of the Earth.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.